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Innovations Affecting Us: Free Software, MicroPatents, and the Internet

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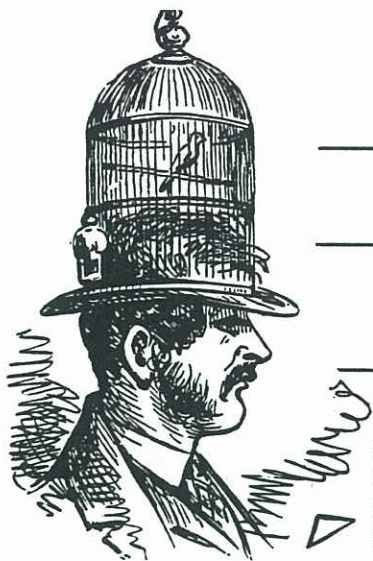
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Innovations Affecting Us

Free Software, MicroPatents, and the Internet by Norman Desmarais

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A few months ago, we reported on **Microsoft's** offer to donate software to schools. This month, another publisher, **Dr. T's Music Software**, announced a similar offer. The company launched a

Schools Can't Wait program to donate children's music software to schools. For every title in the Dr. T's Sing-A-Long series purchased through a retail store, catalog, or direct order, the company will send a free package to a school of the customer's choice.

Parents can select either Kids' Classics, a collection of 25 favorite children's songs, or Around the World, which contains 22 popular children's songs, each from a different country and sung in both English and the song's original language. Purchasers complete a Free Teacher's Copy Order Form contained in the package; and **Dr. T's Music Software** donates a free title to the school designated by the customer.

The Future Kids Center in Stoughton, MA. adopted the Dr. T's Sing-A-Long Series for the music curriculum. The titles combine whole-language and phonetic reading methods to help children learn to read while they enjoy the music and learn new songs. **Ron Berger**, Director reports that teachers have responded enthusiastically to using it in the classroom. Around The World also helps integrate geography into the lessons." **Jane Greenberg**, a teacher, describes Around The World as an "engaging way to learn about other cultures and a wonderful supplement to Social Studies."

Dr. T's Sing-A-Long is sold through **Egghead, Software Etc, CompUSA, Computer City, Lechmere, Nobody Beats The Wiz, MicroCenter, Computer Express, Tiger Software, EDUCORP, Educational Resources, The Edutainment Guide, The Learning Cube, KidSoft, and CD-ROM Warehouse.**

Free Online Service to Emerging Technologies from MicroPatent

MicroPatent's PatentBBS is a free online service that offers researchers, engineers, and other professionals in high technology industries access to information on new patents worldwide within days after the patents are made public by their respective patent offices. The database includes information on every U.S., European, and world patents relating to 12 different high technology industries. Covered industries include: automotive, biotechnology, computers, electronics, environmental science, fiber optics, food technology, lasers, medical devices, pharmaceuticals, polymers, and telecommunications.

PatentBBS provides a complete listing of every patent, including English abstract published over the past month. Users can place orders online for the front page or the complete patent document.

Costs for obtaining patents by fax or mail are \$5 for the first page and \$0.75 for each additional page. For patents older than the last month, users can call MicroPatent's Phone Search service to have a custom search going back as far as 1975.

The PatentBBS database is updated weekly with information on every new patent relating to the 12 industries issued by the **U.S. Patent & Trademark Office** and published by both the **European Patent Office (EPO)** and the **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**. U.S. patents are published when they are issued; but EPO and WIPO patents are published soon after they are applied for. Often, the EPO and WIPO publish patents up to two years after similar patents become public in the U.S. Patents for each industry are classified in up to 20 sub-categories, each of which can be selected and viewed separately. Within each sub-category, users can view a complete list of patents containing information on the assignee and patent title. Users who want more information on individual patents can get abstracts.

To get access to PatentBBS, users log on using virtually any computer with a modem and calling 203-466-5052.

SilverPlatter Announces Internet Subscriptions

Recognizing the potential for information delivery that the Internet offers, **SilverPlatter Information** began a project in the fall of 1993 which tested access to SilverPlatter databases via a direct Internet connection. SilverPlatter uses its **ERL (Electronic Reference Library)** technology to offer participants in the test sites their choice of client software: **PC SPIRS, WinSPIRS, or MacSPIRS**. These ERL clients offer the same functionality as their standalone versions so users do not have to learn a new interface.

The Internet connection offers seamless access to the end-user. **Bob Sessions**, a test participant from the **University of Wisconsin at Madison**, remarked: "The location of information doesn't matter to our users. They can't tell whether they are using the Internet to search databases which are stored across country or whether they are accessing CD-ROM databases housed here in the library."

SilverPlatter sees the Internet as another way to deliver information to its subscribers.

In November, **SilverPlatter** introduced **Internet** subscriptions which are identical to CD-ROM subscriptions. Users subscribe to a specific database and are granted access for the proper number of simultaneous users. Internet subscriptions are priced the same as their corresponding title on CD-ROM in accordance with the appropriate network usage level. Initially, SilverPlatter is offering Internet subscriptions to all of its public domain databases. The company

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attention of the audience, with his practical hints on how to create a 'Win Win' situation by having commitment, consensus and communication. The concurrent sessions which followed each day covered a range of topics from library & information services in Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, information justice and resource sharing to cooperation within and across traditional library and information sectors.

The Satellite meetings/seminars before and after the main event covered a wide area of interests. The *Hui* (meeting) on issues relating to 'Indigenous peoples — Maori, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders' were beneficial for those involved with collections and acquisitions as well as others.

The seminar on 'Copyright' was serious business with a new bill before parliament in New Zealand. The 'Rethinking Reference' seminar conducted by **Anne Lipow, Karen Williams and Helen Hayes** proved to be stimulating, energizing librarians into embarking on changes to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Anne Lipow and John Ober gave an excellent presentation of a seminar on 'Teaching Electronic Information Resources' which was very informative and full of useful hints.

The CODIANZ meeting brought together librarians working with the *Dynix* system to exchange ideas, find solutions to problems, and also to hear from *Dynix* about what was planned for the future. Due to the geographical placement of New Zealand and Australia, the biggest problem for us was the time lag between the availability of new products in the U.S. and these two countries. The problem is compounded by the insufficient availability of information on forthcoming releases. In particular, although we were aware that 'release 150' containing the new 'ACQ rewrite' was being tested in the U.S., our great expectations to find out more about this product at this meeting resulted in disappointment.

As always in these situations one would like the impossible — to be in several places at once — to capture the spirit of each of the sessions which promised to be interesting. The morning and afternoon teas held around the Trade exhibition, was time not only to get a glimpse of new

products and services from a wide range of suppliers from around the world. It was also a time to catch up with colleagues and friends from all over New Zealand and from Australia as well as make new ones. In all, it was a time to talk about collections, conspectus, new products, resources, and exchange ideas on meeting the challenges of the new electronic age without losing sight of the past. The weather unfortunately was not at its best, but the visitors from Australia seemed to welcome the rain as they had been starved of it for months.

It was a week of commitment for the people in each country in working together, while reaching out for fresh new ideas from afar. Australia and New Zealand had for the past few years been working on a joint project which would provide access to each other's national databases and their services as well as gateways to other overseas services with standardised software. A fitting postscript to the joint conference was the news that the contract had finally been signed for this 'State of the art' international library project. It seemed like we had really embarked together. ☺

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expects to make additional titles available as it acquires appropriate rights. *Users can obtain trials for Internet subscriptions by calling SilverPlatter at 800-343-0064 or 617-769-2599 or by sending an email message to info@silverplatter.com.*

SilverPlatter has also established a World Wide Web site on the Internet. This site, called **SilverPlatter World**, offers comprehensive information about the company as well as other information about the electronic information industry. Visitors to the site will find information about SilverPlatter's products and activities as well as the contents of the most recent edition of SilverPlatter's electronic directory and many of its product sheets. Another feature that appears regularly on the Web site is 'This Month's Search' which spotlights a subject of topical interest and shows the kinds of information that an electronic search can provide. In September, this feature originated with a focus on the International Conference on Population & Development that was held in Cairo that month. Since this conference is only held every ten years and sets the policy for population for the next ten years, the search focused on population from

a number of different perspectives: medical, cultural, social, economic and agricultural. Results of the search were published as well as statistical information about the search which included the databases searched. SilverPlatter welcomes and encourages SilverPlatter World users to submit search concepts. Anyone interested in submitting an article, proposal or search concepts, can send an email message to editor@silverplatter.com.

SilverPlatter is also publishing other pertinent information about the electronic information industry, including industry-related articles and links to other World Wide Web sites that relate to the industry.

Internet Index

SilverPlatter's Internet Index is a Web page that indexes information alphabetically and by subject, with links that give immediate access to the information. This project was initiated several months ago when SilverPlatter began a program to train its staff on using the Internet. **Gerry Hurley**, Director of Education Services at SilverPlatter says: We observed that people were frustrated because they couldn't locate informa-

tion on the Internet unless they knew where it was located and the address. We wanted to do more than just provide a listing. So we created our Index with immediate access to the source, whether it resides on a Web server, gopher, or FTP server.

The Internet Index has two components: an alphabetical index (arranged by title) and a subject index. For example, under C in the alphabetical index is an entry for the Charter of the United Nations. By clicking on this entry, users are linked to the actual text of the charter which displays on the screen. Users can also get access under U (United Nations) in the alphabetical index or under Historic Documents in the subject index.

SilverPlatter considers the Internet Index as a way to enhance access to information and hopes that it will become a tool created by and for Internet users that enables anyone to locate information easily. Access to SilverPlatter's World Wide Web page and the Internet Index is free. To visit the site, the SilverPlatter URL is:

<http://www.silverplatter.com>

Instructions for submitting entries for the Internet Index appear on the Internet Index Home Page. ☺